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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USUN NEW YORK 000738

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MCAP](#) [KPKO](#) [LE](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: UNIFIL: GENERAL GRAZIANO CONCERNED ABOUT RECENT
LEBANESE CABINET STATEMENT

REF: TEL AVIV 1783

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: UNIFIL Force Commander Major General Graziano told Ambassador Khalilzad August 14 that he prefers a simple, technical roll-over of UNIFIL's mandate since it will take a few months to assess how Lebanon's new political realities may impact UNIFIL's mandate. He expressed concern over Hizballah's intentions in southern Lebanon, given the "resistance" language in the cabinet statement, but remains adamant that there is no evidence of Hizballah's current rearming in UNIFIL's AOR. Graziano said he expects to receive a formal letter August 18 from the Lebanese government approving an interim set of measures to facilitate the Israeli withdrawal from northern Ghajar and hand-over to UNIFIL. The Lebanese letter would be valid for three months and require an Israeli response during that time period. Graziano expressed serious concern with continued Israeli overflights of southern Lebanon and the possible ramifications of a downed pilot. Graziano requested U.S. assistance in obtaining final Israeli approval for a UNIFIL liaison office in Tel Aviv. End summary.

Technical roll-over of
UNIFIL mandate preferred

12. (C) UNIFIL Force Commander Major General Claude Graziano told Ambassador Khalilzad, in an August 14 meeting, that a simple, technical roll-over of UNIFIL's mandate (which expires August 31) would be better given the changing political situation on the ground in Lebanon with the recently approved Lebanese government and cabinet statement. He described the current period as a "moment of confusion" and noted that it would take a few months to assess if UNIFIL's mandate should be adjusted accordingly.

Need a couple of months to
assess how new political
realities affect UNIFIL

13. (C) Graziano expressed specific concern that Hizballah might seek to use the "resistance" language in the cabinet statement as an invitation to overtly come back into southern Lebanon. If that happens, Graziano said, "we might need to change UNIFIL's mandate so that it can use more force." While Graziano characterized UNIFIL as having "good tactical control" of its AOR, he said the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are "extremely tired and stretched" and without sufficient equipment, fuel or ammunition. Overall, he described the LAF as in a "period of disaster" -- going four months without an army chief -- and said he hoped a new chief would be appointed soon. Moreover, Graziano stressed the importance of increasing the LAF's capabilities since that would be the only way to get rid of Hizballah in Lebanon.

No evidence of Hizballah

rearming in the south

¶4. (C) Graziano remains adamant that there is no evidence of Hizballah's rearming in the UNIFIL AOR, and that Israeli claims of 40,000 rockets in the south is overblown. He stressed that he meets with senior IDF leadership frequently, and, that while they make such claims, they never provide him with any concrete, actionable intelligence.

Ghajar

¶5. (C) Graziano said that he expects to receive a formal letter August 18 from the Lebanese government approving a set of interim measures to facilitate completion of the Israeli Defense Forces' withdrawal from northern Ghajar. Graziano noted that the Lebanese approval would be valid for a period of three months during which time the Israeli side would have to accept the same set of interim measures. He pointed out that the measures would include no specific date for the UN handover of the area to the LAF. Once he receives the Lebanese letter, Graziano said he would formally approach the Israeli government for their approval of the measures. Graziano said he would see the Israeli PermRep August 15 and plans to raise the matter informally with him, as well.

Overflights

¶6. (C) Graziano voiced serious concern with continued Israeli overflights of southern Lebanon, given the risk of a

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plane being lost and the pilot having to eject in UNIFIL's AOR. Such an event, he said, would put UNIFIL in jeopardy, given Hizballah's recent statements about UNIFIL forces reaching a downed Israeli pilot first. Thus, no matter what UNIFIL did with the pilot, return him to Israel or turn him over to Lebanon, it would be a disaster. He said that the more the GOI can reduce the number of jet aircraft flights, the better. He opined "unofficially" that if they wanted to maintain visibility on the AOR they should increase their use of UAVs, since the loss of a UAV results only in the loss of metal, not of a pilot.

Liaison office in Tel Aviv

¶7. (C) Graziano raised UNIFIL's plans to open a liaison office in Tel Aviv. He said that Israeli Foreign Minister Livni had approved the proposal nine months ago but it remains in limbo. Graziano said he thought there were concerns about office members reaching out to non-military officials. He said they had initially proposed a civilian head but had changed to a military head at the Israelis' request and have identified a Swedish Brigadier General. He suggested that the Israelis may now regret their insistence on a military head of office since it will be hard to ignore a Brigadier General who comes knocking on the door. He requested U.S. help in finalizing the matter.
Khalilzad